CAFCE International Committee

Student Engagement Sub-Group

Draft Questions for Student Profiles

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First Name: Morgan Cunningham  
Institution: McMaster University

Where did you work abroad (city, country): Mountainview, CA, USA

When did you go abroad: May 2010

Which work term (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc..): 3rd

Program of study: Bachelor of Engineering, Electrical

1. What motivated you to seek out an international work term?

For me, it was more of a question the opportunity being present at the time. Through my personal network, I was able to correspond with several technology companies [in that area] in fields that I was interested in. If I had to put my finger on a tipping point, though, it would have to be the fact that I felt international experience would give me an upper-hand when applying for jobs in the future (ie., having a diversified resume).

1. How did you fund the travel and other costs associated with this opportunity?

My experience was not a typical case; my funding was provided privately from parties exterior to my host company and the Unites States.

1. Can you tell me what steps you took to secure your co-op position? Did you feel it was hard to secure your co-op position and how would you advise other students to make the same effort?

Persistence is extremely important, and once a position has been awarded, frequent communication is extremely important. Foreign employers are putting themselves in a very vulnerable position by introducing visiting students to their workplace—it is up to the student to create and maintain a link of trust between parties.

1. When conducting your job search did you find that many of the jobs available were in specific sectors? (ie: corporate, non-profit, government, etc.) Where, or how, would you suggest other students focus their search?

N/A; Students should focus on their passion, rather than the sheer necessity of earning pay cheques. If simply making money is the goal, then stay back to do so. There’s nothing worse than being under a visa obligation and stuck in a position abroad with no resources to fall back on.

1. Tell me about the cost of living in (city or country). How did your expenses compare to your income based on the salary you were earning? Were you able to save any money and where did you find savings or discounts which reduced your expenses?

N/A; I lived with family. From what I heard, however, monthly rent was comparable to back home. Food and common necessities were inline (cost-wise) as well.

1. How did you find accommodations and what rent can you expect to pay in (city or country)?

I estimate the average 1bdrm rent in the Mountainview area to be anywhere from $400.00 - $800.00/mo., depending on the quality, size and proximity to landmarks/companies (ie., Google, Microsoft)

1. What, if any, cultural barriers did you have to overcome and what were some of these challenges?

I found that there was certainly a difference between Canadian and U.S. office mentalities; I found the atmosphere to be one of ‘passive aggressiveness’ and little sense of punctuality/urgency. I was told that this is more so a Californian phenomenon, and stems from the surfing movement of the 1960’s. I have noticed that Canadian workplaces tend to be more transparent with constant attention to a definitive schedule.

1. Did you find it difficult to meet new people? What steps did you take to integrate yourself into your new surroundings and make yourself more comfortable in a new setting?

I found it difficult to meet new people. The best thing to do is to attend company social events and meet other interns.

1. Overall, what advice would you give co-op students who are seeking international opportunities?

I would urge students to seek positions in larger, more established organizations; they typically hire 100’s of students—both local and international—every year and have laid the appropriate foundations to help students find accommodations, deal with visa issues and to integrate students into the new setting.

1. Is there anything else you want us to know about your experience?

N/A